

PLANNING SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

Summary: This report sets out the proposed Strategy for addressing identified issues of planning performance to improve the overall customer experience.

Options considered: Options considered within this report are as follows:

1. Support the Planning Service Improvement Plan, namely the Strategy and production of a draft Action Plan.
2. Do not support the Planning Service Improvement Plan – The Committee considers that no further work is necessary in relation to development management performance.
3. To recommend that the Strategy is not sufficient in meeting the identified aims. This could risk not achieving the necessary aims and delayed progress

Conclusions: It is recommended that Overview & Scrutiny Committee supports the Planning Service Improvement Plan.

Recommendations: **That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee supports the Planning Service Improvement Plan, namely the Strategy and production of a draft Action Plan.**

Reasons for Recommendations: To ensure that an appropriate Strategy and Action Plan is in place necessary to provide solutions to the identified service level issues.

LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS AS REQUIRED BY LAW

(Papers relied on to write the report, which do not contain exempt information, and which are not published elsewhere)

None

Cabinet Member(s): Ward(s) affected: All
Cllr Andrew Brown,
Cabinet Portfolio holder
for Planning and
Enforcement

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1. Introduction

- 1.1 During 2021, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered that the Planning Service should be subject to a performance review, following perceived concerns over the speed of decision making, communications between stakeholders and Members and difficulties in obtaining information in relation to planning obligations (S106 contributions). It was also suggested that insufficient focus and/or cross-service priority has been attached to business related proposals. Following this, at the Overview & Scrutiny Committee in March 2022 it was agreed that the Director for Place and Climate Change should undertake to create a Planning Service Improvement Plan (PSIP).
- 1.2 The PSIP is now produced, to be formed of two parts, and this report details the progress made and includes the proposed Strategy for review of Overview and Scrutiny Committee (See Appendix A), which forms the first part of the Plan.

2. Planning Service Improvement Plan (PSIP) - Strategy

- 2.1 The PSIP is comprised of two parts. The first is the proposed 'Strategy', which sets out the necessary steps that will culminate in the production of an Action Plan (the second part).
- 2.2 The proposed Strategy sets out the relevant activities and timescales, leading to the production of the Action Plan. The Action Plan once produced will provide specific SMART measures in addressing the identified areas of improvement and be a comprehensive document covering a multitude of processes and activities.
- 2.3 The primary areas of focus and a brief overview (not an exhaustive list) of the proposed measures are included below:

A) ***Speed of Decision Making***

- A review of the processes involved in decision making to make them more transparent and timelier
- A review of the Scheme of Delegation, given this has been observed to form a common reason for delays
- A review of the planning application validation procedure to ensure that it is effective and timely

B) ***Communication with Stakeholders and Members***

- Establishing improved Member engagement and communications on casework and planning matters
- A review of the member referral process
- A review of the Customer journey to ensure that it is simple, reflective of need and at the forefront of everything we do within the Planning Department

- The development of a comprehensive training programme for existing and future Development Committee Members
- Review of Town and Parish Council arrangements
- Agent / Service User Forum reinstatement
- Developing ways Members can be actively engaged and fully informed of significant enforcement cases and progress

C) *Access of Information*

- A review of the pre-application (and Planning Performance Agreement) service to ensure that it offers value to those residents that use it, whilst remaining achievable for officers given the pressure and demands of statutory services.
- Review of general communications with stakeholders / wider public – e.g. production of regular news bulletins

D) *Alignment of planning and sustainable growth interest*

- Developing a ‘one team’ culture, with a focus of wellbeing and development
- Develop an effective recruitment and retention strategy in conjunction with Human Resources
- Develop an effective strategy to ensure integration of planning with Sustainable Growth in meeting wider Council objectives
- Prioritising “paid for” services

3. Conclusion

- 3.1 The proposed Strategy is intended to address the identified performance issues and result in a detailed Action Plan, with regular monitoring built into the process. Customer and stakeholder engagement features heavily within the proposed Strategy and there has been significant staff engagement already in understanding regulatory and process issues, with the findings to be used in the production of the Action Plan.
- 3.2 Should Members support the proposed Plan, work can be expedited with a view to instigating most measures to be included in the Action Plan by the end of March 2023. Only those measures dependent on external factors are likely to extend beyond this date, however, every effort will be made to implement measures at the earliest opportunity.

4. Corporate Plan Objectives

- 4.1 The Council’s Corporate Plan contains six key themes, these being Local Homes for Local Need; Climate, Coast, and the Environment; Boosting Business Sustainability and Growth; Financial Sustainability and Growth, Customer Focus and Quality of Life. The work of the Planning service relates to all six themes and therefore it is imperative that the service is performing to the best of its ability if all six themes and their objectives are to be realised.

5. Medium Term Financial Strategy

5.1 There are no direct implications for the MTFS as a result of this report.

6. Financial and Resource Implications and Risks

6.1 The delivery of service improvements is dependent on sufficient resources being in place. At this stage there are no direct financial or resource implications, other than that of service resources – this being one of the PSIP considerations.

7. Legal Implications

7.1 There are no legal implications in relation to this report.

8. Sustainability

8.1 Sustainability is fundamental to town and country planning. Wherein the UK planning system is designed to enable the protection and enhancement of the natural and built environment. When operating as required, the planning service has the potential to contribute significantly towards achieving sustainability.

9. Climate/Carbon Impact

9.1 This report has no direct climate change or carbon impact implications; however, the work of the planning service is pivotal in achieving net zero and addressing climate change. The Place Directorate is at the forefront of this work and the planning service improvements will maximise every opportunity to encourage sustainability and reduce the environmental effects of all associated activities.

10. Equality and Diversity

10.1 There are no equality and diversity implications directly resulting from the recommendations or options considered in this report.

11. Section 17 Crime and Disorder considerations

11.1 This report raises no matters of concern in relation to crime and disorder.

12. Recommendation

12.1 That the Overview & Scrutiny Committee supports the Planning Service Improvement Plan Strategy as detailed at Appendix 1.